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Subject: The Moral Constitution of Man.

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PREACHED BY

HENRY WARD BEECHER.



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THE MORAL CONSTITUTION OF MAN.

"For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified. For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these having not the law, are a law unto themselves. Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the meanwhile accusing, or else excusing one another."—ROM. II. 13-15.

The question which the apostle was obliged to argue in the opening of this epistle, was largely the condition of the Gentile or the heathen world. He argues both sides of it. He argues, as you will find in the first chapter, that they were to be condemned on substantially moral grounds; and he also argues that they may yet, nevertheless, be condemned in much less measure than the Jews—a peculiarly offensive turn to the argument; because the Jew held that he had a right to superiority, to prominence, before God, on account of the essential relationship of God to him, and to all that concerned him, no matter how he lived. The fact that men were not Jews settled the matter. They might be just, they might be virtuous, they might be devout; but they were not Jews. They did not believe in Jewish creeds nor worship in the Jewish circle; and that was enough.

The apostle, therefore, is obliged often and most offensively, to go against this bitter, this stupid bigotry of the Jews, which has not died out with the Jews' authority. And here he is arguing that the Gentile nation may, after all, stand better before God than the Jews do. "It is not they that *hear* the law that are the safest," he says, "but they that *do* the law." "Ah!" it is said, "the Gentiles never had it, and of course they did not do it." "But," he says to his objector, "nevertheless, if they do those things under the light of nature which the law commands you to do; if they, by the light that they have, reach the same virtues, the same moralities, the same devout tendencies, which you reach through the law, they shall, under the law that God has revealed in the heart, have some sense of what is right and what is wrong. If they keep that unwritten law; if they serve according to the light which they have, that shall suffice. If you, with

the law, sin, and they sin without it, they will stand, for that very reason, higher than you do. And if you, with the law, disobey it, and they, without the law, obey it, they will stand better in the divine favor than you."

This question, historically considered, was local. It was not without its interest to the Jew, and to every thoughtful mind that was then present. But the apostle settles it upon a ground which makes it universal. It draws very deep in matters of moral government and of character. For, you will observe that the apostle here takes ground with the moral constitution of man as a thing of nature created in him; that man has in himself, not as a full revelation, but in a rudimentary and organic form, an interpreting nature, by which he knows what is right and what is wrong; by which he accuses or excuses his conduct, as he goes to the right or to the left in any line. He declares the fact, with authority, that men receive a revelation, not for the sake of creating in them a moral sense, but simply for the sake of guiding a moral sense that is already created. He declares, substantially, not that religion is a thing superinduced upon the constitution of man, but that it is the right unfolding of that constitution. A revelation is made in part of things not known before; but, for the most part, it is the expounding, it is the commentary, which God makes on the elements which were in man's nature when he was created. There is a moral constitution of souls. There is a right and there is a wrong; and aside from the determination of them which we get from authoritative Scripture, they may be determined by reason of the harmony of the soul's powers, by the law of development, and by the relative precedence which that law, unfolding, establishes.

Let us, then, follow this line out, and look at some of the truths which belong to it, and see if they are not important, and deep, and very solemn.

1. The essential truths of religion (and none more than those of the Gospel—of Christianity) are natural, constitutional, organic. They have their elements in man's own nature. They were not first created when they were declared by inspired men to the world. Inspired men, declaring the truth of God, simply expounded and interpreted that which had already been made known in the very creation of man—in his very nature. A mental philosophy does not create mind. Mind was created before you could make a mental philosophy. The law of conscience did not create conscience. Conscience was created before there could be a law of conscience. A revealed law only brings out into words and into clear declarations that which lay hidden in the nature of conscience. The whole moral constitution is not a thing which is imposed on us by commands *ab extra*. It inheres in man.

It is man. It is the fundamental nature of the human soul.

Any great fundamental truth which you find in the Bible, if you take it by analysis, and carry it back, you will find grounds itself, at last, on natural law. It may not be so of many of the incidental and instrumental explanations of the Bible; for the Bible carries something more than mere fundamental truths. The ordinances and forms of worship may not be traced back to nature; but all those great truths which involve the nature of right and wrong, of inferiority and superiority, of submission, of obligation—all that goes to constitute what we call *moral sense*—every truth which partakes of that nature, has, you will find, a foundation in the nature of things.

Moral consciousness, and all that belongs to moral consciousness, is a part of science. Men oftentimes speak about a revealed truth; and there is much that has been made known which would not have been known if it had not been revealed; but, after all, the fundamental elements of truth, in so far as they relate to man's nature and obligation, are not revealed except in the sense that creation is a revelation. They are provided in man's nature. And if he only had the wisdom to know what he was; if he only had the scientific knowledge to know how to unfold his moral constitution, every man would work from his own moral consciousness to substantially the same ground which is open to him in Scripture. So that, when I preach the Gospel, particularly in its relations to duty and obligation, I feel strong, not only because I believe him that bore witness—because I believe the word of God—but because, tracing the word back, I find it written again in you. I find it to be true when I take either direction. Going out and looking into life, and seeing what men are, what they do, what they suffer, what they want and what is possible, I come to precisely the same results as when I look into the sacred record. Studying man as I do, and studying the word of God, I find the two are respectively witnesses of each other, and both together are stronger than either alone. And all the way through, you shall find the word of God appealing to this consciousness of men, appealing to their reason, appealing to their judgment, appealing to their feelings, to bear witness to the essential truth of that which is stated in the word of God.

Even, then, if men doubt the Church, or creeds, they will not get rid of that which all churches mean and preach, or should endeavor to mean and preach, and which all creeds should endeavor to include. No man has got rid of religion, because he has got rid of the popular expositions of religion, or because he has got rid of the written Book. For religion did not begin in the Book. The Bible is, as it were, the geography of religion, the grammar of religion, the guide-book of religion, and not the source of it, nor the authority for it.

2. On the other hand, a right minded man, if he had no revelation, but had power to keep his mind clear and sensitive, and his conduct in harmony with his higher nature (I am making a supposition, and not declaring a fact), would go up on to the plane of the Gospel. If a man were capable of reading the law of his own being, understanding his own organs and the functions of them, and then following out the indications that exist in himself, he would be brought up to the substantial ground of the Christian religion—that of reading the law which is written in himself. The two are one. Whichever way you start, going from the one in one way, and from the other in another way, the roads meet, and have a common testimony.

Hence, the Gospel is not a super-addition to nature. It is the opening of nature. It is the development of nature. It is the blossom of that which all men alike possess, and which belongs to the race.

You should bear in mind that, unfortunately, the term *nature* is used in two senses. It is used by theologians mostly to signify man's corrupt state. I use it, however, to signify, for the most part, that condition which God first intended. Not that which man has come to by perversion, and use, and habit, and character, but that line of development which was marked out in the decree and plan of God, is what I consider to be *nature*. And if every man had followed out that nature, he would have been brought substantially from his own moral consciousness and experience up to the grounds of the Gospel of Christ.

3. From this fundamental view, it will appear that right and wrong in human conduct, in the main, are not conventional; that they are not things of mere custom; that they are not on the same ground that manners and ordinary social customs are. There are a thousand things in life which may be changed. They are different in different nations. What is valid in one, is not always valid in another. What is regarded as just in one, is sometimes not regarded as equitable in another. Obligations change, and modes of government change; but fundamental principles do not change. The great fundamental principles of right and wrong, as they are interpreted of God—truth, justice, purity, and love; or in other words, comprehensively, holiness—these are the same in every age. It makes no difference how much men may philosophize about them. There is an inherent nature of the soul, and it is the parallel of the body itself. For, though there are a thousand medical systems, or laws of the body and laws of health, sickness and recovery remain just what they are, as facts, no matter what men's theories are. A man may have any theory he pleases of digestion, but digestion has a theory of its own, and does what it pleases. A man may speculate as much as he pleases about his head;

he may believe that there is a brain in it, or that there is nothing in it; but his belief makes no difference with the facts. They remain as they are. If one should say, "A man could live just as well without eating as with,"—could he? If one should say, "That man has been led by the nose by these superstitious doctors who say that he must sleep five or six hours a day; but I tell you that if he would assert his independence he would not need to sleep at all, and he might just as well as not have the whole twenty-four hours to himself,"—could he? Is sleep a part of the doctor's getting up? Are eating and drinking a part of the doctor's superstition? If a man, talking of bones, says, "A man's bones are whalebones, and, if he only would, he might use them as such,"—could he? Try it. Dash your foot against a stone, and see. If a man says, "If you only thought so, it makes no difference about your conduct," well, think so, and put your hand on a fire-log, and see whether it makes no difference. The great facts of the body—the brain, the chest, the trunk, the limbs, the bones, the ligaments, the nerves, the blood, every part—these do not stand in men's notions; they stand in God Almighty's decrees; and they are what they are in spite of you; and they will laugh you to scorn if you attempt to modify them, or traverse them.

Now, the soul has a definite moral constitution, and the faculties of the human mind are clearly coördinated to work well in some directions, and to work ill in other directions; and men may say, "Among so many sects, among so many ministers, and among so many doctrines, nobody can tell what to believe; all is superstition; and I am going to do just what I please." Well, do as you please; but reason has its own law, conscience has its own law, and all the affections have their own laws; and if you use yourself in one way, you will experience more and more joy and peace and communion with God; whereas, if you use yourself in another way, your experience will be that of growing darkness, of growing discontent, and multiplying conflicts; and your whole soul will be turned into a criminal court, and every faculty will be arraigned as a culprit, and brought up for judgment and condemned; and you will be of all men most miserable. You have a law in your moral nature just as much as in your physical nature; and a man's believing or disbelieving has nothing to do with the facts. The consequences are determined from that original creative act which made you organically, and in God's decree, what you are in your intellectual and moral state.

As, then, a man must observe what he is, and must obey the laws of nature, if he would be healthy and strong and happy in bodily things; so it is with religious things. You cannot set aside religion because you do not like it. It does not come by the priests, although

they meddle with it, and sometimes mar it. Nor does it come by the church. The church does not create it. Nor does it come by the Bible. The Bible followed after the moral constitution of man, instead of preceding it.

4. Men are not released from obligations to virtue and religion simply by keeping away from the church, and from preaching, and from the various vexatious intrusions of other men's consciences. There are many who think that if they shut out disturbing truths they will have rest. No, there will be no rest for them. The word of God comes as your friend, to help you, by giving you the state of facts; but if you throw the facts away, you simply throw the help away.

A man lies sick, and sends for his physician. On talking with the patient, and forming his judgment of his case, the physician prescribes such and such remedies to be taken, and forbids him to use such and such articles of food, and obliges him to remain in the house, and perhaps in his room, and possibly on his bed. But after the physician has gone, the man says to his attendant, "Go tell him not to come again; to keep his advice and his medicines away." And then he says, "There! I have dismissed my doctor." If you could only dismiss your disease as easily as you can your doctor, it would be all very well; but to dismiss your doctor and keep your disease, is not wise. The ache stays whether you take the potion or whether you do not take it. The fever beats, whether you believe in this or that or the other thing. The fever is a fact. These things do not depend on quarreling schools of medicine.

A man says, "The High Church are for flummery, and the Low Church are for fanaticism. One church is for sensuous worship, and another church is for no outward worship. One is for doctrines, and another is for no doctrines. One is very rigid in its notions, and another is lax and loose in its notions. They are all by the ears. And I am going to take my own way. I will manage my case myself." You may in that way get rid of churches, and of a thousand disagreeable circumstances; but will any man get rid of that nature in which the law is written, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself?" Here is the law that determines selfishness. The marrow of the moral nature of man is the necessity of habitual, constitutional, continuous, characteristic benevolence.

Go out, now, into the world. Go out greedily to get gain. Go out and try to be happy. Wind yourself up with the key of selfishness. Try to make your own powers serve you faithfully in harmony with each other. They are at a jangle with themselves. And you are not any better off because you have put away from you the church and ec-

clesiastical things. For the obligations rest not on the church, but on you.

Not they alone who have made a profession of religion are bound by the duties of religion. Every man that lives is bound by them as much as church members. A man does not see any better for being in an oculist's establishment. The necessity of his seeing, or the desirableness of it, does not arise from the fact that he is in an oculist's establishment. It arises from the nature of things. And if a man has ophthalmia, the necessities of his eye, and the laws of sight, are just the same as though he were under medical treatment and care. And yet, there are a great many people who seem to think that of course a man ought to do certain things because he is a member of the Church. They seem to think that being a member of the Church imposes obligations on a man. No, the obligations came long before the Church could have imposed them upon him. You say, "I am not a member of the Church, and you ought not to expect that of me." But are you not born? Have you not a temperament? Have you not that law of God written in you which makes it necessary that you should come to the help of the Church? I preach right, purity, holiness, to you, not because you are baptized, not because you are included in the covenants of the Church, but because you are men. If you had never heard a Sabbath bell, nor seen a Bible, these great obligations would have rested down on you, just as they do now, by the very primal conditions of your creation. They are as universal as man; and you are inexcusable, whoever you are, if you set aside the duties of religion because the Church ministers them. The Church does not create them.

5. There is an impression among many that there is a freedom and a largeness gained by going out of the sphere of religious teaching into doubt, into skepticism, into infidelity. There is much that men call infidelity which is not infidelity. A man may rise to a higher truth, and he may drop a lower one in doing so. A man, in a corrupt age, and in an ignorant church or sect, may, like Luther, rise to a higher ground. And calling him an infidel does not make him one. Whatever truth makes you more faithful, more just, more pure, more loving, more intimate in your relations to God, and more confident of the reality of invisible things; whatever view releases you from the thrall of biting, bitter, heated prejudices, is not infidelity. It is revelation. And embracing such a truth or view is rising to a higher form of religious belief. But there are many who do take on infidelity in its relaxing forms—that infidelity which denies, negates, everything; that is, which takes away the stress of their consciences. And they laugh, and say, "I used to feel guilty if I broke the Sabbath; but I do not now. I used to think that I ought to read the Bible every day; but now I do

not read it once a year. I am freer than I was. I used to think that I ought to pray; but prayer is a superstition." And so men go on setting aside one, and another, and another point of fundamental religious belief; and they think they are becoming more and more free; and they ridicule Christians, whom they think to be bound hand and foot.

Now, I do not mean to say, as against infidelity, that the Christian Churches have the perfect view of religion. It is not my purpose to say that the theology of the times is more or less perfect or imperfect, or more or less crooked or straight. But I do affirm that the faith which is held by all sects of Christians is in the main a guide and a light. It might be a better light, but it is *a* light.

You and another man are walking in a troublous path. There are precipices on the right, precipices on the left, and deep morasses below, from which, if a man be mired in them, it is almost impossible that he should be extricated. Your companion is walking with a little lantern, containing only a tallow candle. You are walking without anything by which to guide your steps. He, with his tallow candle, in a little lantern, carries his dim light before him, and, taking one step at a time, manages to pick his way, though with some difficulty. You, who are so bold as to venture without any light, say to him, "Your tallow candle makes a miserable pretence of giving light: of all absurd things, the greatest is the attempt to make one's way through the world with such a light as that;" and you knock it into the mud. And it is pitch dark.

It may be that the lantern could have been improved; but is it improved by darkness? Now the man has nothing to guide himself with. That was the only light he had. It was a feeble, glimmering light, to be sure; but it was enough, though he was obliged to walk slowly and cautiously, to guide him safely. But you have knocked it out of his hand. And he makes a misstep, and plunges headlong down the precipice, and perishes.

Suppose all is true that you say of sectarianism and superstition: suppose all is true that you say of churches:—after all, are they not better than nothing? Is there not much help in them? Is there not much guidance in them? Do not they attempt to take hold of those fundamental instincts which belong to men, and which must be cared for and satisfied? And do they not go a certain way toward satisfying them? And does not infidelity bring men into bondage and darkness, instead of into liberty and light?

6. By throwing off religious faith, and the restraint of the Church, men do not escape conviction of sin, nor a sense of guilt, nor fear, nor unhappiness. The apostle, in the first chapter of his epistle to the Romans, speaks upon this point:

"That which may be known of God, is manifest in them; for God hath

showed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse."

If there were not a church on the globe; if there were not a Bible in the world; if there were not a teaching minister on the earth; if there were nothing but the sun by day, and the stars by night, and the rolling seasons; and if there were but a single man living, and he had the faculties that we have now, after all, he would be without excuse. For God has made the heavens, and the glimmering light of nature; and these are enough to hold a man responsible for his character and conduct.

And then, in the second chapter of the same epistle, the apostle says,

"When the gentiles which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these having no law, are a law unto themselves. Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the meanwhile accusing, or else excusing one another."

There is no man of any considerable degree of reflectiveness, or of any considerable degree of Christian sensibility, who is not made unhappy in himself by the way in which he is living. In the excitement of a career of business, in the intoxication of pleasure, men drown their unhappiness; but the moment there comes a leisure moment, there comes a time for thought. Reason rises up in every man's heart, under such circumstances. There is not a man here, I do not care how careless he is, who has not hours in which he sits in judgment on himself. He measures sometimes by one rule, and sometimes by another. A man's reason looks over his life, and he says, "I have toiled fifty years, and I have built my house, I have reared my dwelling strong, and filled it with articles of use and ornament, and I have a place among men; but, after all, what am I profited? Is life worth what I have spent for it? Am I happy? If I might live again, would I live right over the same life? Have I satisfied my early aspiration? Have I realized my own ideal?" Or, if he looks more closely at himself, in his habit of analysis, he says, "Am I selfish, or am I not? I have learned to wield the pen; I know how to paint the picture; I can carve the statue; I am able to build a house or a ship; I can guide the machine; I have the skill to invent curious help for domestic industry; I can handle the sword; I have power to manage anything in this world, almost; but myself I cannot manage. I do not know how to take care of my temper. My conscience is all the time jangling with my better feelings. On the one side is reason, and on the other side is passion. I am often carried away by temptation. Everything is wrong. I understand how to control money, but my own self I do not understand how to control. My being is an enigma to me. I am not acquainted

with its laws. I am ignorant of the nature of my soul. And there is nothing on the globe that I make such poor business in dealing with, as myself."

A man reads this, not out of the Bible, but out of his own soul. There is a law of God. There is a way in which the mind was made to act. And if a man's faculties do not live in harmony (as nobody's do), then his own thoughts accuse him, and his judgment judges him, and his moral sense brings him under condemnation.

It is in such cases that the Gospel is lifted up, and that a way is shown to men; and though they may set aside the overtures of Jesus Christ, the revelation of mercy, they cannot set aside this judgment that is perpetually going on in their consciences.

7. The gradation in condemnation is a matter that ought to excite a passing thought in our minds. Those who have been taught the truth, and who believe it, and who then sin, are condemned in the greatest measure. Their guilt is according to the light they have had. But let no man say, "I was born of ignorant parents, I was born remote from instruction, and I cannot be condemned." Yes, according to your measure you will be condemned. You may not be condemned as others are; but the lowest grade of condemnation will be more than you can bear.

No one can afford to be sick in this world, in his body. All the contrivances and all the adaptations of nature have never made anybody attempt to be sick. You never can change the body in this respect. You can make the body love odious things—tobacco, and what not; you can very much modify the digestive powers; but no modification, no sort of treatment, ever made sickness an agreeable thing. It goes against the grain altogether.

And by no means can a soul that is sick, that is out of order, be at peace with itself, or be happy. There is a condemnation that rests upon it just so long as it is in that state. And now comes the declaration of the Gospel,

"Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

It rests not alone upon those that have been instructed, but upon everybody. Everybody that carries a disordered imagination, a darkened understanding, or an undeveloped or perverted conscience; every man who is living by the power of pride, or by the pioneering of selfishness; everybody that has substituted lust for sentiment; everybody that takes counsel of his animal nature, and not of his spiritual nature; everybody that is a man of the senses and of the flesh, must be born again. And though he may not be condemned as they are who have sinned against greater light, after all he will be condemned, and his condemnation will be as great as he can bear.

8. This moral constitution is not a mere thing of time. It is not an arrangement for a special occasion, nor for a transitory scene. I understand it to be the testimony of the Saviour, and of the New Testament all through, that right and wrong are eternal; that they are not local, nor secular, nor transient; that pain follows disobedience; that he who does wrong suffers, and will suffer as long as he does wrong; that the moral constitution which divides men in this world, divides them in the other; and that he who by the help of God obeys the divine will, rises to higher and higher degrees of happiness. As on the one hand, he that, in this world, loves that which is right, and seeks that which is right, and, so far as in him lies, does what is right, goes on forever and forever with increasing joy and blessedness; so, on the other hand, he who, in this world, perverts his body and soul, grows worse and worse. And the evil effects of his misspent life do not drop off from him when he dies, but go on with him. There is some system of moral discriminations, of rewards and punishments, that goes on forever. It is Christ's testimony it belongs to universal being, it is characteristic of God's moral government, that right and wrong are discriminable qualities, and that pain goes with one and pleasure with the other—and not just now, as belonging to the developing period, but in all time. The teaching is, that to all eternity these qualities go on, and that if a man continues sinful forever and forever, he will suffer forever and forever, while if he is holy forever and forever, he will be happy forever and forever.

You are not sinful, then, because you have been preached to; you are not sinful because the Bible says so and so; you are sinful on account of the perversion of that nature which God gave you, partly through ignorance, and partly through the willful blinding of your eyes. For a thousand reasons you have gone wrong. But when an offer is made to you of pardon for the past and of help to set the broken bone, or to readjust the dislocated joint; when God in his infinite mercy through Jesus Christ gives you a remedy for your mistakes and sins thus far if you will forsake that which is evil in the future, you turn away from him, and reject the proffered help, and will keep the terrible disease. Having the remedy within your reach, you are destroyed.

Men are very much like lunatics in hospitals. All their wants are provided for; everything is done, that can be done, for their comfort and welfare; they have kind and benevolent physicians and attendants; and yet, they set fire to the institution and burn it up. They are not made well by this deed. It is simply a part of their insanity to do it. And many men who are not supposed to be lunatics are doing the same thing. They are attempting to destroy the very institutions which

were erected for their benefit. They are resisting, rejecting, setting aside, all those curative influences by which God would bring them out of the state into which they have come through the perversion of their nature, back into that state which he designed for men.

It now only remains for me, having lain these brief facts before you, to say, that this is *your* business, not mine. In so far as you are concerned, I have the sympathies which properly exist between man and man, and which I borrow from my God; and yet, after all, *to his own Master every man stands or falls*. This matter concerns you first, and it concerns you most. *My* duty is completed in presenting the subject to you. *Your* business is to profit by the instruction you have received.

By the continuous importunity of the pulpit men come at last to have a kind of hidden feeling that they confer a favor on the church when they repent and come into the church. They seem to feel that God himself is laid under obligation to them. They seem to think that they have done a good thing in consenting to repent and go over to the side of religion.

This is a living and dying matter. It is a question like that of a mortal disease which has taken hold of you. When you take the doctor's medicine, you do not confer a favor on him so much as you do on yourself. And if you refuse salvation, if you reject the Lord Jesus Christ, it is you that lose, not I. Though every man on the street where I live were unvirtuous, virtue would be just as right, just as good, and just as profitable to me. Though every man in New York but you were a spendthrift and a vagabond, economy, frugality and a wise financial management, would be just as good for you. Every man stands for himself, on his own feet; and in nothing so much as in the concerns of his own soul.

You have your own nature, and the law of God is written on that nature. You have that in you which will always interpret right and wrong. If you go wrong, you entail on yourselves sorrows so long as you go wrong. And I bring to you the tidings of health—of a Physician who can cure the soul, fill it with light, fill it with joy, and lift it above itself, and finally restore all wastes, and correct all dislocations, and cure all morbid conditions, so that you shall shine out as the stars in the heavens. If you take this blessed Friend and skillful Physician, tidings of whom I bring to you to night, joy forever and forever be on your head! If you reject him, *you alone shall bear it*.

When the hour of death comes, no man can have companionship in dying. No two or more persons can die together so as to hold each other up. Every man dies alone, dies for himself, and goes before God on his own behalf. "Every one of us shall give account of *himself* to

God." Even if the whole heaven is filled with thronging multitudes, you will seem to yourself to stand as though there were not another person in existence besides you. And all the weight of God's law and of God's authority will centre and rest full on you.

It is your interest to repent and to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. And while it is a day of mercy; while God is near to you; and while by your conscience, by your hopes, and by your fears, you are being drawn to him, it behooves every man of you to take hold in earnest, so that it shall be not a mere experiment, but a blessed success and victory.

PRAYER BEFORE THE SERMON.

We bless thee, our Father, for that knowledge which is given us, through Jesus Christ our Lord, of thy being, and of thy heart. We are no more strangers or foreigners. We are now of the household of faith. We are brought near. All our fears are driven away. Our hope grows apace, even unto salvation. By faith working through love, we discern thee. By faith we dwell in thee. We appropriate thy righteousness to ourselves, and enter into all the covenants of love with thee, and are made one—one with God, and one with Christ Jesus, and one with the indwelling Spirit. And so our life is comprehended in thine. So all our ways follow thy ways.

We rejoice in the blessedness of this communion: in all the peace which we have had; in all the joy which it has inspired; in all the promises which it holds out for the future, and which are Yea and Amen. Not one of thy promises shall fail. We may put our foot upon every one of them, and they shall not give way beneath us.

Thou, O God, dost love us better than we love ourselves. Thou art more gracious unto us than we know how to be unto ourselves. And therefore the more is the guilt of our destruction, and the more wicked is our breaking away from thee and turning to ourselves, and hewing out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water.

We rejoice, O Lord! in thy recovering grace; in thy patience which works in these obdurate hearts; in that fatherly kindness which thou hast shown, and art showing. And we pray that thou wilt not weary of the work of subduing that fractiousness of our dispositions which provokes thee.

Be pleased, O God! to spare us. Look upon the face of thine anointed. Behold us in Christ Jesus. And we pray that we may be, by thy care and culture, transformed into his image. And if we shall yet stand confirmed in virtue, and strong in all that is good, and fruitful in love, holy and beautiful, it will be by the grace of God. Not unto us, but unto thy name, shall be the praise. For, thou shalt work in us, and fashion all our goodness for us, working in us to will and to do thy good pleasure.

Now, we beseech of thee, accept our thanksgiving for the blessings of the day. It has been a day of rest. It has been a day of knowledge. It has been a day of incitement. Thou hast made the sanctuary pleasant unto us; and thou hast made our homes as another sanctuary. And we thank thee for all these relationships, and all the enjoyments which flow from them.

And we pray to night, in the hour that is set apart, walled in by darkness and by storms, that we may find that peace of God which passeth all understanding. May we rejoice in the sanctuary again, and take new courage, with new confession, and new hope and faith, for the life which is to come. And we pray thee, when we shall go down into the morrow, that it may be with our loins girt about, with a clearer sense of duty, with more manliness, and with more Christian fidelity. And may we thus live from Sabbath to Sabbath, until all our days on earth are over. Then throw wide open the gate. Then stand thou therein to receive thy prodigals home. Then put thine arms about our neck, and clothe us, and put the ring upon our hand, and bring us with joy and rejoicing into our Father's house.

And to the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, shall be praises everlasting.
Amen.

PRAYER AFTER THE SERMON.

Our Father, we beseech of thee that thou wilt bless the word which has been spoken, of caution, and interpretation, and warning. May we find in it reasons for more vigilance. May we be more earnest, and take heed to the things which are within us, as well as to the things which are without. Reveal to us the relations of the life to come. Make us to feel that we are casting ourselves away. The most precious of all things to ourselves, we are selling for dross. What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?

O Lord, our God! we beseech of thee that thou wilt, by thy Spirit, bring men to thoughtfulness, and to a better purpose. May there be many that shall be gathered, by the power of thy Spirit, into the kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

And to thy name shall be the praise for ever and ever. *Amen.*

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